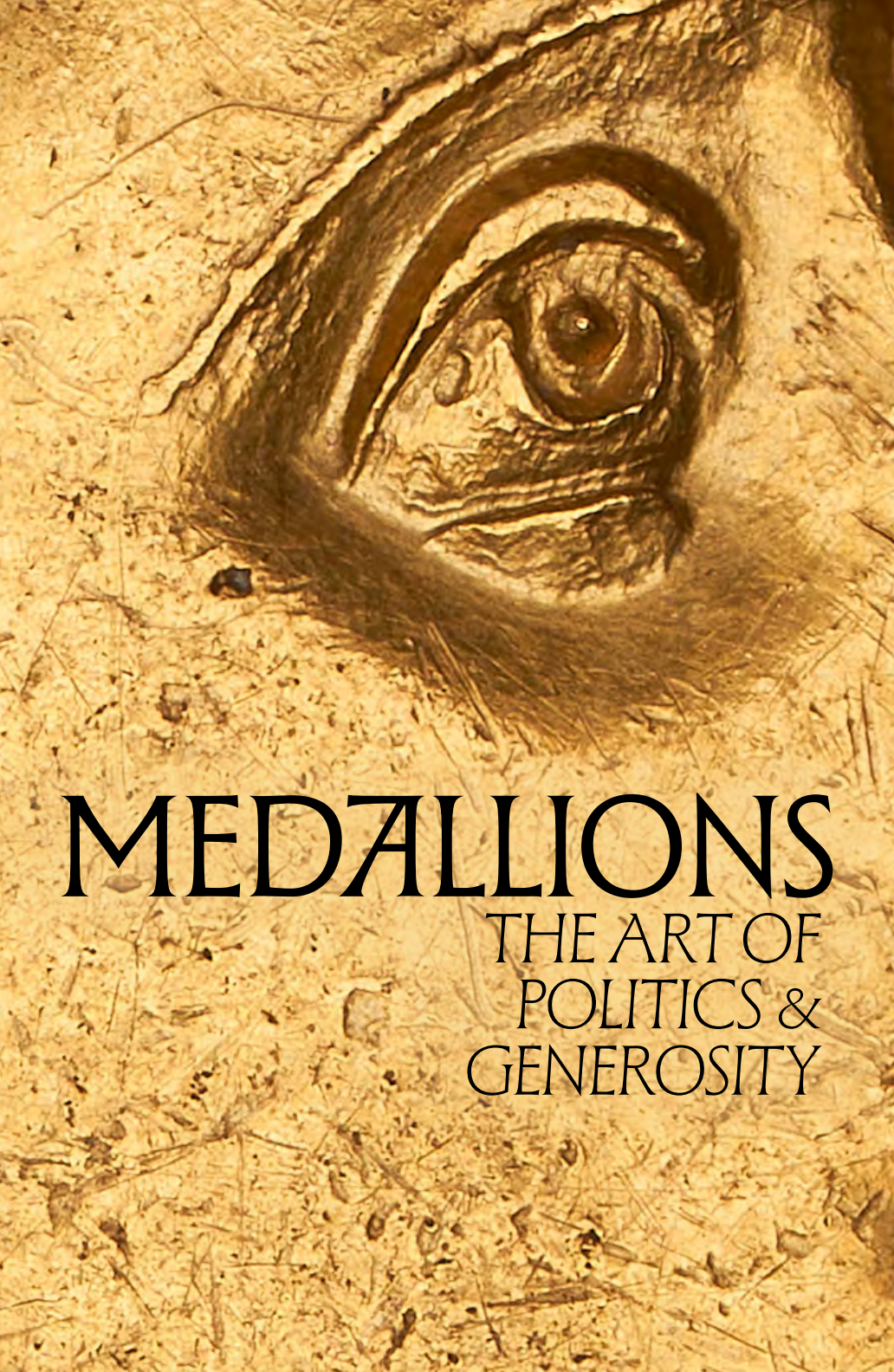
MEDALLIONS
THE ART OF
POLITICS &
GENEROSITY

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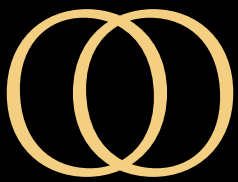

MEDALLIONS

THE ART OF POLITICS & GENEROSITY

Medallions: The Art of Politics and Generosity

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection
Jonathan Shea, Curator, Coins and Seals Collection
With assistance from Sage Barnes, Post-baccalaureate Fellow
and Sacha Gragg, Museum Trainee

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Medallions are among the most exquisite examples of Roman art from late antiquity surviving today. Distributed as gifts at imperial celebrations, they demonstrated an emperor's generosity at moments of personal, political, and military triumph. Their images and inscriptions acted as propaganda to bolster the imperial regime and advertise its strength, success, and virtue. They also show us what emperors thought people expected of them. For their recipients, medallions were a mark of social status and imperial favor. Displaying medallions received from the emperor asserted one's loyalty and place in the Roman hierarchy. As expressions of celebration and politics, favor and generosity, medallions offer us a glimpse of the intersection of art and empire at the end of the classical world.

A NEW ERA

After uniting the Roman empire under his rule in 324, Constantine the Great wanted to reform his realm. Some of his plans included construction of a new capital at Constantinople and calling the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. Among the more obscure decisions of his first two years as sole emperor was the creation of a new office, the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, the Count of the Sacred Largesses. While perhaps not as dramatic as a new city or religion, this administrative reform was an integral part of Constantine's restructuring of two things: state payments and gifts and imperial propaganda. One of the Count's responsibilities was the creation of medallions.

Constantius II, 9-solidus medallion, gold, Antioch, after 348

Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, 18200511. Photograph by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann)

While the reverse of this medallion is dominated by the image of Constantius II equally important are the items depicted below the wheels of his ceremonial chariot. Here we see torques, brooches, buckets of coins, and gold and silver leaves. These were all items produced by the department of the Count of the Sacred Largesses and distributed alongside medallions at imperial ceremonies.

pg. 8: **Constantine I, 3-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 335–36** BZC.1950.6

Although they are neither medals nor coins, medallions share some features of both those objects. They were given out during great state celebrations against a backdrop of imperial pageantry. Medallions functioned as gifts, signifying imperial generosity, and as art, spreading state propaganda. Generosity was an important imperial trait, and gift giving was both a symbol of this quality and a chance to reward and bind power groups to the emperor and his family. Medallion designs, almost always featuring an imperial portrait on the obverse and a reference to an event, imperial virtue, or other family members on the reverse, were exquisite examples of the engraver's art designed to capture the majesty of the emperor's person and the benefits of his rule.

Under the Counts of the Sacred Largesses, Roman medallions entered a new phase. Previously, coin and medallion production had been handled by different officials, and medallions were created in a wide variety of sizes and weights. Constantine united these responsibilities under the counts, so medallions began to be struck in regular sizes based on multiples of the circulating currency and designs on elite medallions and widely circulating coins began to act as unified state propaganda. Constantine was equally innovative in his experimentation with the style and composition of the imperial portrait and the reverse designs used to express imperial power.

This miniature illustrates the page dedicated to the Count of the Sacred Largesses in a list of late Roman state officials. Surrounding his tribunal (blue table) are materials for which he was responsible: bags and dishes of coins, ingots of metals, broaches and belt buckles, and leaves of silver and gold. All might have been distributed by emperors alongside medallions.

Æthicus., 1401–1500, 83v, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Latin 9661. Image source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

MEDALLION OR MULTIPLE?

The two modern terms for the objects in this exhibition are "medallion" and "multiple." Each word focuses on one of their aspects, either ceremonial or financial, to the exclusion of the other. "Medallion" stems from their role in state ceremonies and the record of how their recipients displayed and treasured them. "Multiple" refers to their grading based on multiplications of the weight of the corresponding currency. For gold medallions this meant the solidus, struck at 1/72 of the Roman pound, while silver medallions were graded in multiples of the siliqua, worth 1/12 of a solidus. Bronze medallions were inconsistent in their size and weight, possibly an indication of both their lower status relative to gold and silver and the bronze coinage's fluctuating value and metal content. As their primary function was the demonstration of imperial favor and the public display of status (signified by the relative size of different medallions) we have opted to use "medallion" throughout this exhibition and booklet.

Constantine I,
4.5 solidus medallion,
gold, Siscia, 327–28
BZC.1949.4

MINT-MARKS

As official products of the Roman mint, each medallion features a mint-mark, usually at the bottom of the reverse side. The most common mark is an abbreviated form of the name of the city housing the mint, for example N for Nicomedia, Con for Constantinople, and SIS for Siscia. City names are sometimes prefaced by P for pecunia*, meaning "money of," or SM for* sacra moneta*, "sacred money," sometimes shortened to S. Matching these marks to the known movements of the emperors shows that medallions were almost always given out only when the emperor himself was present. A handful of exceptions were struck in the name of the imperial family and presumably distributed by them.*

DETAILS:

PTR, *pecunia Treverensis*, money of Trier, 2-solidus medallion, March 1 326
BZC.1951.18b

SMA, *sacra moneta Antiochiae*, sacred money of Antioch, 5-aurei medallion, 293–95
BZC.1950.5

SIS, *Sisciae*, Siscia, 4.5-solidus medallion, 327–28 BZC.1949.4

CONS, *Constantinopoli*, Constantinople, 1.5-solidus medallion, after 326 BZC.1951.17

SMKE, *sacra moneta Cyzici*, sacred money of Cyzicus, fifth workshop, solidus, 324
BZC. 1948.17.512

STATEMENTS OF STATUS

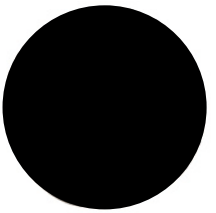
Medallions were a way for the emperors, through gift-giving, to reinforce their view of the Roman social order. To receive a medallion was to be singled out as part of a select group deserving of recognition, but not all recipients were equal. After Constantine standardized the weights of medallions, emperors had two means of reinforcing the social hierarchy through their largess. For a given event, medallions with similar designs were produced in graded weights of gold, silver, and bronze and distributed according to the rank of recipient. When later displayed by their owners, these medallions became public statements not just of imperial favor but also of the individual's place in the imperial system. Mints also struck ceremonial coins, often with simplified versions of the medallion designs, for distribution at same event's celebrations. The value of the coins distributed, both in terms of metal and quantity, depended on the status of the recipient.

MEDALLION HIERARCHY

Medallions shown actual size.

Constans I, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Siscia, 343, struck for Constans's tenth anniversary as emperor. BZC.1948.17.3913

Constans I, 6-siliquae medallion, silver, Thessalonica, 338, struck for Constans's fifth anniversary as emperor. BZC.1948.17.3917



Constans I, heavy-miliarense medallion, silver, Siscia, c. 345, struck for Constans's tenth anniversary as emperor. BZC.1948.17.3914

COIN HIERARCHY

Coins shown actual size.

Constantius II, solidus, gold, Antioch, 347–50 BZC.1948.17.585

Constantius II, siliqua, silver, Antioch, 342–47 BZC.1948.17.532

Constantius II, follis, Copper, Antioch, 347–48 BZC.1948.17.660

pg. 18: Constans I, heavy-miliarense medallion, silver, Siscia, ca. 345 BZC.1948.17.3914

RANK & MEDALLIONS

Although most medallions have no indication of who they were created for, one group does include the rank of the recipients in the inscription. In 325/6 Constantine I struck two types of gold medallions. The larger, made from 4.5 solidi, has the inscription SENATVS (Senate) on the reverse. The smaller, with the inscription EQVIS ROMANVS (Roman knights) is a 1.5 solidus medallion. The more elite senators received a medallion three times the size of that given to those on the next rung down the social ladder, the equites *or knights. Constantine used his portrait to appeal to both groups as a man of their own class. He is shown in his senatorial toga on the former and on horseback, the ancient mark of a knight, on the latter.*

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine I,
4.5-solidus medallion,
gold, Rome, 326

Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, 18200663. Photograph by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann)

Constantine I,
1.5-solidus medallion,
gold, Nicomedia, 325

BZC.1947.23

CEREMONIES & REWARD

Medallions were given out at imperial spectacles, like a procession or games, that gave emperors a chance to demonstrate their benevolence by distributing food, wine, oil, textiles, jewelry, and coins. These celebrations might mark exceptional events, a military triumph or the birth of an heir, milestones in an imperial career, coronation anniversaries or the assumption of an office, or regular points in the calendar, such as New Year or Easter.

In addition to public celebrations and grants to the people, these events were also marked with the distribution of *donativa*. Originally *donativa* were exceptional payments to imperial officials, especially within the army, but by Constantine's time they made up the majority of a state salary. Coins were often stamped with designs and inscriptions referencing the reason for the payment. This system reinforced two ideas: first, that in place of a regular salary, state employees now received money expressly linked to imperial generosity; second, that these wages-turned-gifts were associated with moments of imperial success and celebration. The implication was that as long as the army and elite continued working to the benefit of the emperor they would be rewarded.

Constantius II as Caesar, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 326–37 BZC.1951.17

An important part of celebratory processions was the emperor's distribution of monetary gifts to his people. This medallion shows the junior emperor Constantius II pulled through the street in his chariot as he scatters coins, presumably to a crowd just out of frame. The image's focus on Constantius's act of generosity as part of the celebration visually links imperial success with gift-giving and reward.

Constantius II as Caesar, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Trier, March 326
BZC.1951.18b

This medallion celebrates the joint consulship of Constantine I and his son Constantius II. Being elevated to the highest magistracy in the senate was an important step for Constantius's career. Constantine and Constantius are shown in their official regalia riding in a possibly fictional chariot pulled by four elephants flanked by lictors, the traditional bodyguards of the consuls. Whether real or fantasy, the overall message of this mixture of imperial spectacle and ancient republican tradition is encapsulated in the inscription, "Eternal glory of the senate and people of Rome."

Constantius II, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Arelate, 354
BZC.1948.17.3919

The ceremony of an imperial *adventus*, or arrival, was celebrated when the emperor entered a town or city. He would be greeted by local dignitaries, clergy, and state officials on the outskirts of town and then process through the gates. On medallions this is often shown as the emperor on horseback outside of city walls being hailed by a female personification of the town, or, as in this example, in simplified form with the emperor alone, his hand raised in salute to the citizens.

Constantius II, siliqua, silver, Thessalonica, 351–54 BZC.1948.17.605

The coin above was issued for the anniversary of an imperial coronation. The inscription VOTIS XXX refers to *vota*, vows or prayers, for the thirtieth anniversary. The attendant celebration, and the payments made to imperial officials using these coins mark the fulfillment of the *vota*. The second part of the inscription, MULTIS XXXX, renews those same vows for another ten years. An unsubtle message on a coin given to those who would both benefit from further rewards should that milestone be reached and who would be most able to overthrow the emperor should they choose to do so.

Constantine I, 3-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 335–36
BZC.1950.6

Not all medallions depict an event or ceremony. Some use their imagery and inscriptions to proclaim more general celebrations. In this medallion, the small *genii* holding a garland represent the prosperity brought to the people by the emperor. The inscription is more generic as well, reading simply "To the joy of our emperor."

CONSTANTINOPLE

One of the most consequential events of Constantine I's reign was the dedication in 330 of Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman world. To celebrate, Constantine struck a whole series of medallions of all metals and sizes, some of which displayed a personification of the city on one side with either an attribute assigned to it or, as in this case, a scene from its foundation story on the other. Constantinopolis's military helmet is inspired by that of her sister, Roma, while her regal dress is more reminiscent of the personifications of great eastern cities like Antioch. On the reverse is a warship with Victory on its prow. This is a reference to the naval campaign of 324 that took place in the waters around Constantinople and secured Constantine's rule over the whole empire.

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine I,
medallion, bronze,
Constantinople, 330

BZC.2024.002

PORTRAITS

Throughout his reign Constantine experimented with the imperial image, and thus with the way the emperor was presented to the Roman people. He inherited a centuries old rounded artistic style in deep relief. These portraits of bearded emperors in armor reflected the military ethos of the third- and early fourth-century rulers. Around the same time that he reorganized the production of medallions under the Count of the Sacred Largesses, Constantine also radically changed the imperial portrait. He adopted a more abstract style in a lower relief that was influenced by the art of the Hellenistic kingdoms going back to Alexander the Great. Hellenistic coins showed just the heads of their kings (not full busts) wearing diadems and gazing upwards. Constantine adopted all these elements for his medallions. Departing from Roman tradition Constantine's changes emphasized his place as a monarch above all else. Eventually he would switch back to military busts, but he preserved the shallow relief and Hellenistic kingly attributes. By the end of Constantine's reign he had arrived at an imperial portrait that combined traditional Roman elements with Hellenistic ones, presenting an image of imperial power that was both innovative and reassuringly familiar.

Galerius, 5-aurei medallion, gold, Antioch, 293–95
BZC.1950.5

Galerius's medallion is the epitome of a late third- and early fourth-century imperial portrait. His bearded bust wearing armor and a laurel wreath was considered a suitable public image for the gruff military emperors of that time. The deep relief lends itself to the rounded, almost sculptural style common on medallions and coins of this period.

The portraits on Constantine's medallions from the 320s were a radical departure from those seen under Galerius. The relief is flatter, and the bust has been replaced with a Hellenistic-style head gazing upwards. Instead of a Roman victor's wreath, Constantine wears a Greek royal diadem. This became more elaborate as his reign progressed, moving from a simple band to a pearled string and then to a band of pearls and jeweled plates.

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine I, solidus, gold, Nicomedia, 325–6
BZC.1948.17.375

Constantine I, siliqua, silver, Rome, July–August 326 BZC.2023.002

Constantine I, 4.5 solidus medallion, gold, Siscia, 327–28
BZC.1949.4

Constantine I, 3-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 335–36
BZC.1950.6

Continuing his experimentation with the imperial image, in the 330s Constantine kept the earlier schematic style, but returned to a bust portrait, dropping the upward gaze. The use of a bust allowed for the return of a military uniform. It has even been suggested that the emperor's raised right shoulder is a sign that his arm is raised in salute. This is the most elaborate diadem to appear on Constantinian medallions, with an intricate pear and jeweled plate piece and a large rosette at the front.

Constans I, 4-heavy silique medallion, silver, Siscia, 338 BZC.1967.21

Constantine's children continued to use his final portrait style and sometimes even resurrected his earlier Hellenistic experiments. Doing so emphasized their connection to their father, prioritizing the strength and continuity of the Constantinian dynasty over individual achievements.

Theodosius II, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 430
BZC.1969.14

Constantine's experiments of the 320s had rewritten the rules of how emperors presented themselves to the public. The low relief and mixture of Roman and Hellenistic elements adopted by Constantine continued largely unchanged for two centuries, and the influence of this style can be seen in imperial portraiture well beyond that. But occasional specks of individuality began to break through the Constantinian façade of imperial power. In this case, Theodosius II's beard only appears on this medallion and coins associated with his consulship in 430.

DISPLAYING MEDALLIONS

Many medallions are preserved today in pendants, bracelets, belts, and other pieces of jewelry. They have also been found set into furniture. Whether adorning a person or decorating a home, the public display of medallions was a symptom of a society in which wealth and status were integral to social maneuvering and politics. What better way to display rank and political allegiance than with a medallion given by the emperor himself? Almost every piece of jewelry prioritizes the emperor's image, with that side of a medallion chosen to face outward. In the pendant shown here, Constantine I's bust has been favored over the image of his two sons, in honor of whom the medallion was struck, shown on the reverse.

Pendants shown at half size.

Circular pendant with 2-solidus medallion of Constantine I, gold, Sirmium, January 324

BZ.1970.37.1–2

DDCONSTANTINVSMAXAVG

VIRTUES

By Sage Barnes and Sacha Gragg

Depicted on many late Roman coins and medallions are physical embodiments of virtues, usually portrayed as female. While they were not technically deities, they still had dedicated temples and cults in the fourth century. The virtues had real rhetorical power, especially when utilized on medallions and coins. Most of the virtues began to appear on coinage after the republic, as the new emperors realized they could tie themselves and the empire to the virtues, legitimizing their reign and associating themselves with ideals that Roman citizens cared about. Emperors used coinage to remind citizens of their military victories, their loyalty to the empire, and the health and happiness they brought to the Roman people. The virtues experienced a resurgence on coins and medallions under the rule of Constantine, likely as a replacement for the pagan gods in a new era of Christianity. By the late 4th century, all but Victory had disappeared from coinage, having been replaced in turn by Christian imagery.

VICTORIA & VIRTUS

Victoria is both the Roman version of the goddess Nike and the virtue of victory and triumph. Virtus is the embodiment of prowess, valor, courage, and masculinity. Constantine I and Constantius II used Victoria and Virtus to highlight their military successes and legitimize their reigns. Constantine shows Virtus holding and being crowned by Victoria, bound captives at her feet. The inscription "To the glory of emperor Constantine" links her to the emperor. Constantine II depicts Victoria holding her symbols of laurel and palm surrounded by the inscription "To the victory of our emperor."

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine I, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Nicomedia, 327–28

BZC.1957.4.23

Constantius II, medallion, bronze, Rome, 352–54

BZC.1948.17.3926

VICTORIA

TRANSLATION:
Victory, triumph

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Wings, laurel wreath, palm branch, trophy

FIRST COIN: 265 BCE

LAST COIN: 629 CE

MEANING:
Imperial military success, protecting the people

VIRTUS

TRANSLATION:
Prowess, Valor, Courage, Masculinity

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Helmet, spear, cuirass, *parazonium* (dagger)

FIRST COIN: 71 BCE

LAST COIN: 321 CE

MEANING:
Imperial military prowess, masculinity, power

CONCORDIA & SALUS

Concordia is the virtue of harmony, concord, and political agreement. Pictured on the solidus of Crispus from 324, her image celebrates his role in ending the conflict between Licinius I and Crispus's father, Constantine I. The inscription reads "To the harmony of our emperors." Concordia holds a cornucopia and a caduceus, symbols of prosperity and negotiation. Salus is the embodiment of wellbeing, health, and the welfare of the empire. She is featured on a bronze follis of Fausta holding two children, associating Constantine's wife and sons with the reverse inscription "To the welfare of the state."

Medallions shown actual size.

Crispus, solidus, gold, Cyzicus, 324

BZC.1948.17.512

Fausta, follis, bronze, Constantinople, 326

BZC.2023.022

CONCORDIA

TRANSLATION:
Harmony, agreement

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Cornucopia, *caduceus* (staff with intertwined snakes), *patera* (bowl for religious libations)

FIRST COIN: 62 BCE

LAST COIN: 325 CE

MEANING:
Harmony between political groups or factions or the end of conflict

SALUS

TRANSLATION:
Health, wellbeing, welfare

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Often enthroned, a snake, scepter, *patera* or ears of corn

FIRST COIN: 91 BCE

LAST COIN: 328 CE

MEANING:
Represented the health and wellbeing of the Roman people through their leaders

FELICITAS & PIETAS

Pietas is the embodiment of dutifulness, faith, and loyalty. Felicitas is the virtue of happiness, the divine giver of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. On the medallion, Fausta, wife of Constantine I, holds her children and is flanked by Pietas and Felicitas. Pietas highlighted Fausta's loyalty and dutifulness as a wife and mother, while Felicitas conveyed their happiness and prosperity, as the medallion was created to celebrate the birth of her son Constans I.

Medallion shown actual size.

Fausta,
2-solidus medallion,
gold, Trier, 324

Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, 18200813. Photograph by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann)

FELICITAS

TRANSLATION:
Happiness, fortunate

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Caduceus, *patera*, branch, scepter, or cornucopia

FIRST COIN: 68 CE

LAST COIN: 383 CE

MEANING:
Linking happiness, prosperity, and fortune to the emperor and empire

PIETAS

TRANSLATION:
Dutifulness, faith, loyalty

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Diadem, veil, stork

FIRST COIN: 109–108 BCE

LAST COIN: 340 CE

MEANING:
Loyalty to family or to the empire, imperial dutifulness to their role

SECURITAS & LIBERTAS

Securitas embodies security, stability, and the established order of the empire. Her message is utilized on a coin featuring Constantine's mother, Helena, with inscription "To the safety of the republic". Libertas is the virtue of freedom, liberty, and overall freedom from domination within the empire. Magnentius pairs Libertas and Victory on his coinage to establish his legitimacy after usurping the throne from Constans I, framing it as an act of liberation. The inscription also references this event, reading "To the victory of the emperor, liberator of the Romans."

Medallions shown actual size.

Helena, follis, bronze, Constantinople, 326
BZC.2023.021

Magnentius, solidus, gold, Trier, 350–53
BZC.1948.17.669

SECURITAS

TRANSLATION:
Order, security, stability

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Leaning on a column

FIRST COIN: 62 CE

LAST COIN: 353 CE

MEANING:
Security and protection of the Roman people

LIBERTAS

TRANSLATION:
Freedom, Liberty

VISUAL SYMBOLS:
Pileus (Freedmen's cap), spear

FIRST COIN: 126 BCE

LAST COIN: 353 CE

MEANING:
Freedom from domination or slavery and the emperor's protection of the people from tyranny

MILITARY TRIUMPH

Medallions often extolled the emperors' military achievements. A popular image type shows the emperor triumphant over an enemy, as in Constantine's medallion above. This example appears to be a composite of multiple points of a triumphal celebration. The emperor wears his ceremonial armor and carries a trophy made of enemy arms while trampling a captured enemy. The Phrygian cap and trousers tell us that this defeated soldier is a Persian. By contrast, Constans's silver medallion carries a much simpler image of the emperor as soldier standing triumphant with a military standard in his hand. The inscription is also more general, indicating that Constans has defeated not a specific enemy, but outsiders in general. He is the "triumpher over the barbarian peoples." Military imagery was particularly common on silver medallions and ceremonial coins, which formed the bulk of special payments to the army.

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine I,
4.5-solidus medallion,
gold, Siscia, 327–28
BZC.1949.4

Constans I,
4-siliquae medallion,
silver, Siscia, 337–50
BZC.1948.17.3916

FAMILY

An unusual feature of Constantine I's medallions is that many were struck not in the emperor's name, but in those of his relations. It is possible that Constantine was reacting against the Tetrarchy, a system of imperial rule set up by Diocletian (284–305) whereby emperors were chosen based on ability rather than heredity. Constantine's seizure of his father's jurisdiction in Britain, Gaul, and Spain had been a direct challenge to this system. After conquering the whole empire in 324, Constantine associated his family with his rule. His mother and wife became empresses, his sons and nephews held important military commands and advanced through the ranks of the senate. Each family birth, marriage, anniversary, office held, and victory was celebrated in the same manner as Constantine's own, and all were marked with the production of medallions and ceremonial coins. On many of these Constantine's relations are shown in the company of or as embodiments of the chief virtues of imperial government. In this way the emperor set about laying the foundations of a hereditary Constantinian dynasty.

The consulship, shared by two men for one year, was the highest magistracy in the senate. Inaugurated with games and distributions to the people, the appointment of new consuls gave emperors a chance to demonstrate their generosity. For Constantine I they were also a way to introduce his sons to the elite and public life. On these two medallions three of Constantine's sons are shown in a consul's ceremonial regalia holding eagle-topped scepters. The inscription records that this was the third consulship of the 24-year-old Crispus and 8-year-old Constantine II, while Constantius II was celebrating his first consulship at the age of 9.

Medallions shown actual size.

Circular pendant with 2-solidus medallion of Constantine I, gold, Sirmium, January 324

BZ.1970.37.1–2

Constantius II as Caesar, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Trier, March 326

BZC.1951.18b

Fausta's medallion, adorned with her portrait on the obverse, was struck to commemorate her elevation to the rank of augusta (empress) in 324. Her new title was a reward following the birth of her third son, who is referenced on the reverse where the enthroned Fausta is shown holding a baby. She is flanked by Pietas (Dutifulness) and Felicitas (Happiness)—virtues she personifies by having produced three imperial heirs.

Constantine I's nephew Dalmatius is shown as Virtus (Prowess) and a military conqueror. He never led an army, but medallions like this were part of Constantine I's attempt to engineer the joint succession of his three sons and two nephews.

Medallions shown actual size.

Fausta, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Trier, 324

Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, 18200813. Photographs by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann)

Dalmatius as Caesar, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 335–37 BZC.1950.7

Constantine I involved his sons in military campaigns from a young age to build their reputation with the army. Crispus, a successful general, is shown nude and muscular, holding a spear and shield with a sword belt around his neck, reminiscent of images of classical heroes like Achilles. Constantine II is shown in military attire on both obverse, as a bust, and reverse, where he holds a globe and spear with his foot on a suppliant Sarmatian. The inscription "Prince of Youth" reflects Constantine II's age of 6–7 years.

Medallions shown actual size.

Constantine II as Caesar, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Trier, 322–23 BZC.1951.16

Crispus as Caesar, solidus, gold, Cyzicus, 324 BZC.1948.17.512

Following Constantine I's death in 337 there was a purge of the imperial family that undermined his succession plans and left his three sons as joint emperors. The three brothers met in Viminacium in 338 and agreed to split the empire between them. Constans I, in whose territory the meeting was held, struck this medallion to commemorate the event. The three brothers are shown together beneath the inscription "Perpetual happiness." Constans, though the youngest, chose to place himself above his brothers in the center with an inscription marking his fifth anniversary as emperor—the benefit of being the creator of the medallion.

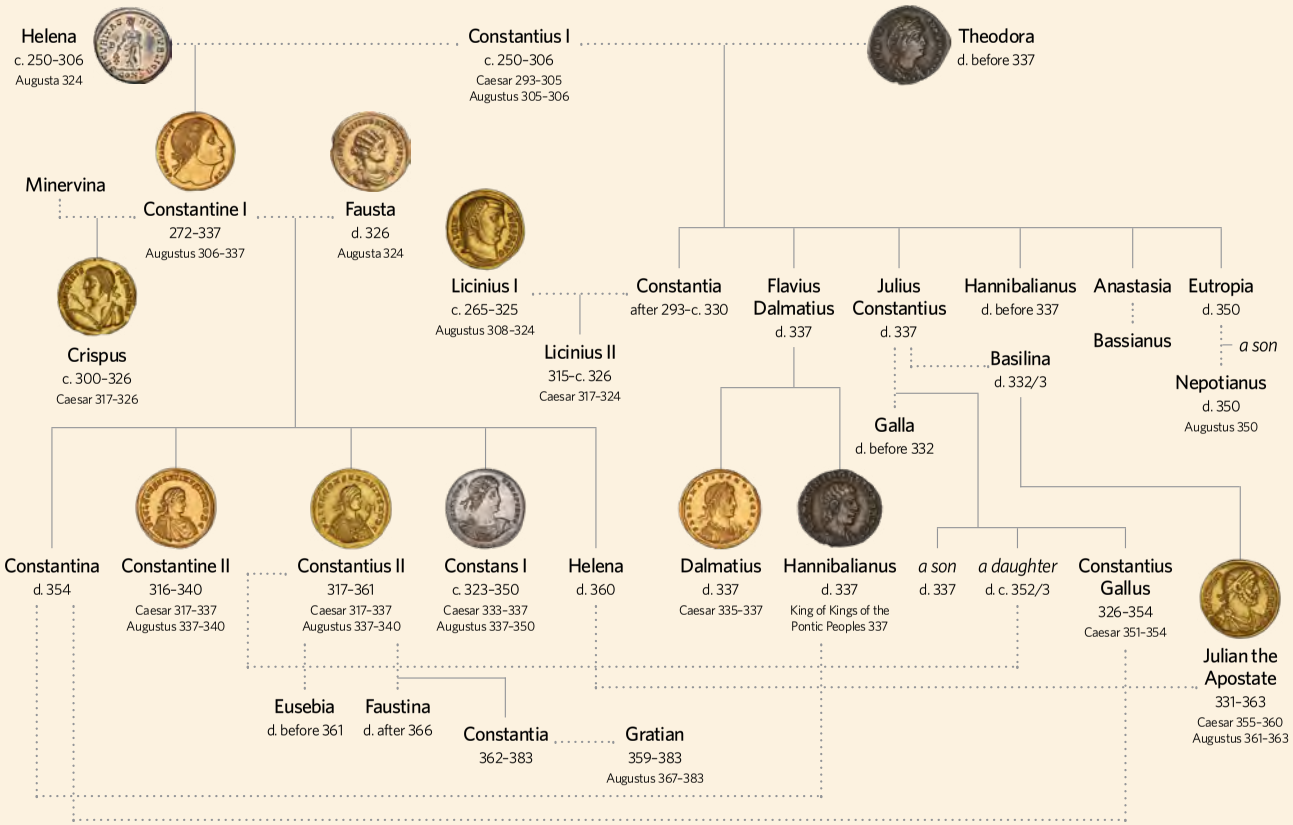
Medallions shown actual size.

Constans I, 4-siliquae medallion, silver, Siscia, 338

BZC.1967.21

CONSTANTINIAN FAMILY TREE

MARRIAGE — CHILDREN



LATER MEDALLIONS & CEREMONIAL COINS

From the later fourth century each of the standardized sizes of medallions increasingly received a standardized design. For example, along with the ubiquitous imperial portrait on the obverse, the 2-solidus medallions usually feature an image of Roma and Constantinopolis on the reverse. These were struck no matter the celebration; designs specific to individual events became increasingly rare. About a century later, from 450, large gold medallions began to go out of fashion, with fewer being struck by each generation. Although examples have been dated through the sixth century, some of them magnificent pieces of art, the heyday of the gold medallion was over after 602. The same is true of silver medallions, where the designs became not only less diverse but also poorly executed and struck on irregular blanks. What was true for medallions was equally true for ceremonial coins. After 450 fewer designs were struck for specific ceremonies and fewer ceremonies were celebrated with the distribution of coins. Eventually the only ceremonial coins produced were silver issues, which continued into the eighth century as the last vestiges of the late Roman medallion tradition.

Medallions shown actual size.

Valens, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Trier, 375 BZC.1960.57

Valens, 1.5-solidus medallion, gold, Antioch, 367–75 BZC.1953.59.2

Although standardization was not complete in the later fourth century, the reverse of most 1.5-solidus medallions had the adventus design, showing the emperor arriving at a town on horseback. The older inscription "Fortunate arrival" (*felix adventus*) was replaced with "To the glory of the Romans" (*gloria Romanorum*). The 2-solidus medallion usually featured enthroned personifications of Roma, wearing a helmet and military boots, and Constantinopolis, with a cornucopia and turreted crown and with her foot resting on a warship.

Justin I, 5-siliquae medallion, silver, Constantinople, 518–27
BZC.1948.17.3933

At first glance the design of this medallion conforms to the standard anniversary type with an inscription recording the *vota* for the emperor's fortieth anniversary within a wreath. The poor execution of the design and the badly formed blank highlight the decline of medallions in the sixth century. But more than that, Justin I was emperor for just nine years, making the inscription meaningless. *Vota* inscriptions had fossilized after the death of Theodosius II in 450, and Justin I's successor Justinian (527–565) abolished donatives attached to imperial anniversaries.

Coins shown actual size.

Theodosius II, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 437
BZC.1958.8

Justin II and Tiberius II, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 578
BZC.2013.004.216

Ceremonial coins also became standardized but there were exceptions. Theodosius II struck a coin in 437 in honor of the marriage of his daughter Licinia Eudoxia to his cousin Valentinian III. The couple are shown flanking Theodosius, surrounded by the inscription "To a happy marriage." One of the last examples of such a coin was struck under Justin II to commemorate the coronation of his chosen successor, Tiberius II, in 578. The two emperors are shown ruling side by side, something that they did for just nine days before Justin II's death.

Justinian I, miliarense, silver, Constantinople, 527–38 BZC.1957.28

Maurice, siliqua, silver, Constantinople, 583/4–602 BZC.1966.9

Ceremonial silver coins were struck throughout the period but, as with other coins and medallions, their designs became less diverse, in this case focusing on the theme of military victory. In the fifth century, victory came from the emperor who is shown standing in military attire surrounded by the inscription "To the glory of the Romans." By the reign of Maurice (582–602) this had been replaced by a cross flanked by palm leaves, an ancient attribute of Victory. The new message was that military victory came through Christ.

Coins shown actual size.

Theodosius II, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 416 or 418 BZC.1969.12

Leo I, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 458
BZC.1967.1

Tiberius II, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 579
BZC.1948.17.1716

Maurice, solidus, gold, Constantinople, 583 or 602 BZC.1948.17.1765

The one celebration that continued to have unique coins struck specifically for it was the imperial consulship. While these were regular solidi rather than medallions or ceremonial denominations, they do feature special imperial busts in consular regalia on the obverse and often an image of the consul enthroned on the reverse. After about 450 the emperors assumed the consulship less and less often and ceased numbering their consulships on their coins. The last true consular issues were struck by the emperor Maurice in 602 although the costume appears much later.

Pendant set with 12-solidus medallion, Maurice, Constantinople, 583–4 BZ.1955.10.1

EPIPHANY MEDALLION

In 583 a son was born to a reigning emperor for the first time since the birth of Theodosius II in 401. The baptism of the new heir, aptly named Theodosius, during Epiphany 584 was the first event of its kind in 172 years and merited the creation of an exceptional medallion. Maurice's medallion for his son conflated the imperial and holy families by using Christian imagery to represent the ceremonies surrounding Theodosius's birth and baptism. The medallion emphasizes how much imperial

power, Roman identity, and state propaganda had changed since Constantine I's time two and a half centuries earlier. This medallion is all the more extraordinary as Maurice was the last emperor to strike gold medallions.

The obverse has an upper and lower register surrounded by the inscription "Christ our God, help us." Above all sits the Virgin (empress) enthroned with Christ (Theodosius) on her lap flanked by two angels. In the lower left the Nativity of Christ stands in for the birth of Theodosius. To the right is the Epiphany with the Magi presenting their gifts to Christ and the Virgin. This mirrors the ceremony where the chief officers of state and the senate would visit the empress and child and present them with gifts eight days after the birth. The reverse shows the Baptism of Christ, a clear reference to the baptism of Theodosius for which the medal was struck. The quotation from Matthew draws a connection between the son of God and the son of the emperor, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

PSEUDO-MEDALLIONS

By Sage Barnes

Pseudo-medallions are fake or imitative medallions, but the ways in which they are fake differ greatly. They were often struck from unofficial dies (stamps used to produce coins and medallions) meant to mimic official medallions, but with limited success. Some pseudo-medallions are double sided, like a real medallion, and others are uniface—having a design only on the front—with the back either blank or the mirror image of the front. Pseudo-medallions weren't always made from metal of the same thickness as genuine medallions and coins, and some are incredibly thin. These differences help identify fakes, as well as the inscriptions and designs. Inscriptions on pseudo-medallions are usually jumbled, and their designs are noticeably less sophisticated than the original. Pseudo-medallions often survive inlaid into jewelry. While not genuine signs of imperial favor, pseudo-medallions must have bestowed some social status on their owners.

Enkolpion with imperial portrait (possibly Anastasius I) and Dionysos, gold, late sixth–early seventh century BZ.1958.26.1

pg. 68: **Medallion of Emperor in a Chariot, gold, sixth century** BZ.1950.37

This is actually two separate pseudo-medallions set back-to-back, with the obverse picturing Anastasius I and the reverse Dionysus. The pairing is immediately suspicious, as Dionysus had never appeared on an imperial medallion, let alone opposite a Christian emperor. It is possible that the two sides were not created as a set. Equally strange is the pendant's garbled inscription, which reads "DNANASTRVIST." From afar, it may have looked like a genuine inscription, but up close, a literate Roman would have instantly known it was a fake. It is possible that this pseudo-medallion may have been created outside the Roman empire, where knowledge of Latin was less common.

Fragmentary Bracelet with Medallion of Emperor in a Chariot, gold, sixth century
BZ.1950.37

This bracelet features an emperor in a chariot led by six horses and surrounded by winged Victories. This piece was set into a bracelet and worn as a visible status symbol. Using a pseudo-medallion is an interesting attempt to gain status without having any real connection to the emperor. That this is a pseudo-medallion is clear from both its garbled inscription and the fact that it is uniface with no design on the back.

MEDALLIONS & DIPLOMACY

A large proportion of medallions found today are discovered beyond the boundaries of the empire. They played a significant part in Roman diplomatic relations with neighboring rulers. As valuable objects, medallions could be used to transfer wealth, acting as diplomatic gifts or tribute, although sending a gift of coins would have been far more efficient. This suggests that, just as inside the empire, the impressive size and artistry of medallions were meant to convey imperial power and majesty abroad.

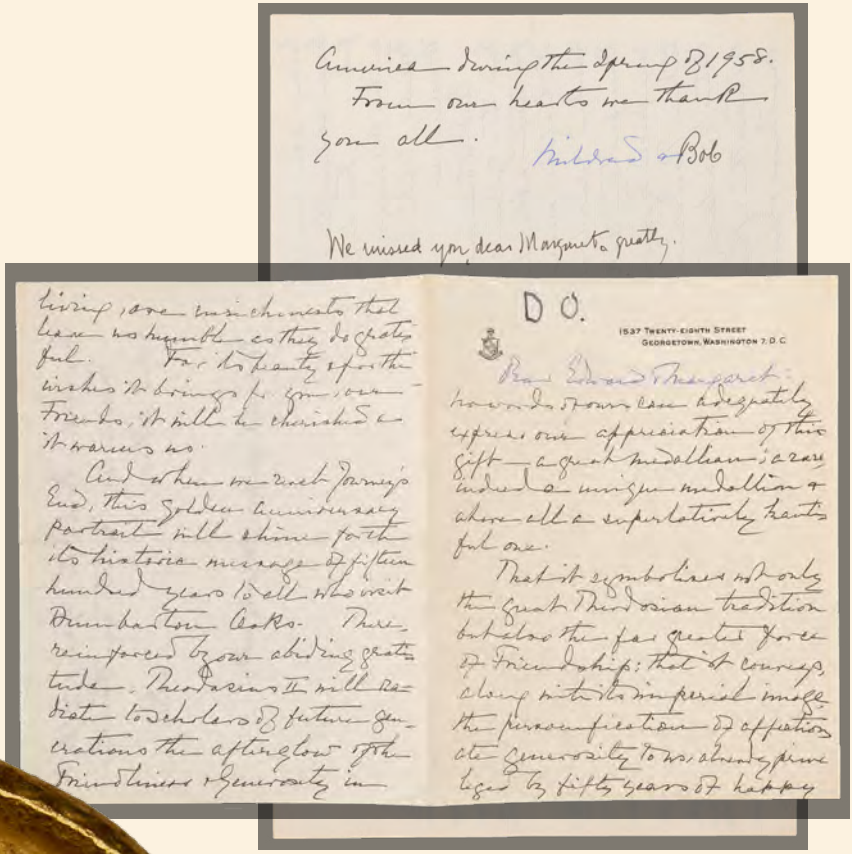
Tiberius II sent a one-pound gold medallion to King Chilperic of the Franks. The Merovingian monarch was keen to show off the gift from Constantinople, and its size and appearance was recorded by the Gallo-Roman bishop Gregory of Tours. The medallion had the imperial portrait on one side with the inscription "Tiberius Constantine eternal emperor," and on the other the emperor riding in a four-horse chariot with the inscription "To the glory of the Romans." Just as the varying sizes of medallions mattered inside the empire, the size of the medallions he received was important to Chilperic. It was a sign of the value the empire assigned to him as one among several neighboring rulers, as well as perhaps subconsciously a message about the wealth and generosity of emperor Tiberius. However, it was not just the pound of gold that impressed the king and his chronicler, it was also the design. With their images of majestic emperors, conquered barbarians, and imperial virtues medallions were symbols of imperial might, a gift that emphasized the true hierarchy of rulers in the world, always with Rome firmly on top.

STILL CELEBRATING

The founders of Dumbarton Oaks, Mildred Barnes and Robert Woods Bliss, built the medallions collection in the early decades of the twentieth century. One of the final medallions to enter the collection is particularly interesting, as it was given to the Blisses by a group of their friends on April 14, 1958, to mark their 50th wedding anniversary. The 2-solidus medallion of Theodosius II was described by those organizing the gift as "a beautiful object," and it created quite a stir when it arrived at Dumbarton Oaks. The Advisor in Numismatics at the time, Philip Grierson, quickly recognized that this was not only a remarkably preserved and exquisite piece of fifth century art but also a unique medallion—nothing like it was known to be in any other collection. The Blisses loved their gift. Based on their thank you letter, they appreciated the parallels between the reasons for the medallion's creation and its latest purpose. Struck to celebrate Theodosius's consulship in 430, it was a statement of his generosity, and 1,528 years later it once again served as a declaration of generosity and celebration.

Theodosius II, 2-solidus medallion, gold, Constantinople, 430 BZC.1969.14

Obverse shown on pg. 41.



Arrived during the Spring of 1958.
From our hearts we thank
you all.
Mildred & Bob

We missed you dear Margaret greatly.

living, one may choose that
heart as humble as they do grate-
ful. For its beauty & for the
wishes it brings for you, our
Friends, it will be cherished &
it warms us.

And when we reach Journey's
End, this Golden Anniversary
portrait will shine forth
its historic message of fifteen
hundred years to all who visit
Dumbarton Oaks. There,
reinforced by our abiding grati-
tude, Theodosius II will ra-
diate to scholars of future gen-
erations the afterglow of the
Friendliness & Generosity in

D O.

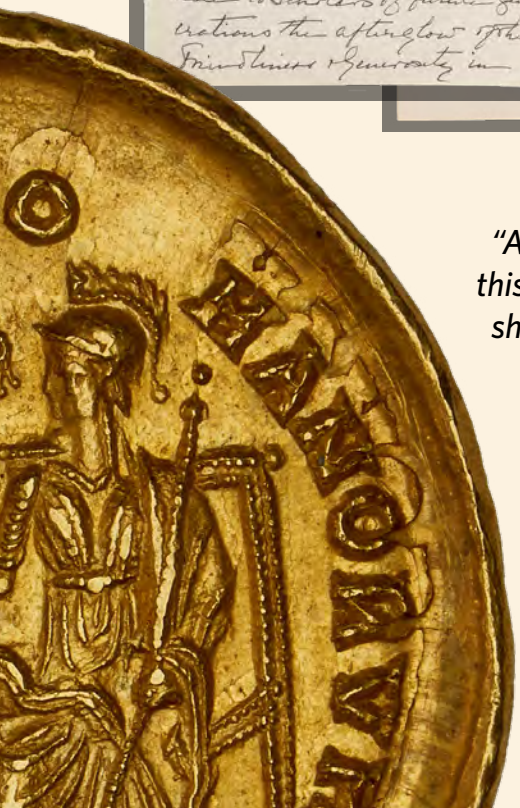
1537 Twenty-Eighth Street
Georgetown, Washington 7, D. C.

Dear Edward & Margaret:

How can I adequately
express our appreciation of this
gift — a great medallion, a rare
indeed a unique medallion & —
above all a superlatively heart-
felt one.

That it symbolizes not only
the Great Theodosian tradition
but also the far greater force
of Friendship; that it conveys,
along with its imperial image,
the personification of affection
& generosity to us, already prov-
ed by fifty years of happy

Dumbarton Oaks, Museum, Archives



"And when we reach journey's end, this golden anniversary portrait will shine forth its historic messages of fifteen hundred years to all who visit Dumbarton Oaks. There, reinforced by our abiding gratitude, Theodosius II will radiate to scholars of future generations the afterglow of the friendliness and generosity in America during the spring of 1958."

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Jonathan Shea, Alexandria VA, July 2025